

## *Presidential Award for Excellence Honors UCAR Mentoring Program*

BOULDER—The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research's mentoring program, Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science (SOARS), has been selected as one of ten institutions receiving the sixth annual Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring. The award recognizes ten institutions and ten individuals for promoting participation among women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in scientific and engineering careers. President Bush announced this year's recipients today in Washington, D.C.

Thomas Windham, director of SOARS, will attend the awards ceremony on December 12 in Washington, accompanied by Christopher Castro, a graduate student at Colorado State University and SOARS participant who helped nominate the program. "I'm excited for UCAR and all the people who've supported the program over the past six years," says Windham, "especially the mentors who volunteer so much of their time, and the very dedicated protégés." SOARS protégés are students in the last two years of undergraduate and first two years of graduate study.

"The president views these programs as essential to our nation's future. All barriers must be removed because research is enriched when the broadest possible range of people participate," says Rita Colwell, director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). "Especially at times of national crisis, we need all of our best minds working together to bring science and technology to bear on urgent issues."

The Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring is administered and funded through NSF and goes to people and institutions who work with students in K-12, undergraduate, or graduate-level education.

### **About UCAR's SOARS program**

Now in its sixth year, SOARS is designed to interest students from traditionally underserved communities in academic degrees and careers in atmospheric science and its related fields. SOARS is a year-round program that includes a ten-week paid internship each summer. Protégés have come from over 40 participating universities and colleges.

In 2001 there are 43 active protégés, 21 of whom took part in this summer's program in Boulder. Seventeen of the 43 protégés attend graduate school; the remainder are undergraduates. Three of the 17 have completed a master's degree and passed Ph.D. qualifying examinations. Since SOARS' inception, 6 additional protégés have completed master's degrees and entered the professional scientific work force.

One of the most influential aspects of the program has been its strong emphasis on mentoring. Approximately 70 staff members, mostly at UCAR and the National Center for Atmospheric Research, but also at other participating national labs, volunteer as mentors in either scientific research, scientific writing, or community life each year. A

protégé who has been in the program for a year or more is also assigned to each incoming protégé as a peer mentor.

In addition to NSF, SOARS sponsors include the U.S. Department of Energy's Environmental Sciences Division, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA's Office for Education and Public Outreach, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Global Programs, the NOAA/University of Colorado Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences, and the UCAR university community. UCAR is a consortium of 66 universities offering Ph.D.s in atmospheric and related sciences.

#### **About the presidential mentoring award**

Up to ten individuals and ten institutions annually may qualify for the national award, which includes a \$10,000 grant and a commemorative presidential certificate. The awardees are considered exemplars for others interested in developing similar programs.

The mentoring awards, which have been given annually since 1996, recognize a long-term commitment to providing opportunities for greater participation in science and engineering by all Americans. The awards honor those whose personal and organizational activities have increased participation of underrepresented groups in mathematics, engineering, and science.

The Department of Engineering at the University of Denver was also named a recipient of the award today.

#### **On the Web:**

Fact Sheet on Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring: <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/ehr/hrd/paesmem.asp>

Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science:  
<http://www.ucar.edu/soars>

Joint White House–NSF news release:  
<http://www.nsf.gov/od/lpa/news/press/pressrel.htm>